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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Five Apparent Cases of Unusual Disease Prompt District Health Investigation

South Central District Health is investigating five reported or apparent cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). Five women from south central Idaho, ranging in age from 60 to 83 years, have been diagnosed with the sporadic form of CJD; four of the women have died. A laboratory diagnosis is pending on two of the women. Idaho usually experiences about three cases of the disease in a year. Complete records are not available for this disease in Idaho since it was not made reportable in the state until July, 2004.

Usually, a specific cause is not known for cases of the sporadic form of CJD. Persons with CJD are usually over the age of 60. Four of the women lived in Twin Falls County and the fifth woman was a resident of Minidoka County.

The variant form of CJD has been linked to mad cow disease or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and usually affects younger people. These cases are not suspected to be the variant form by the physicians who diagnosed them. In 2002, one case of the variant form of CJD was diagnosed in a Florida resident that had lived in the United Kingdom.

South Central District Health, in conjunction with the State of Idaho epidemiologist, is investigating the unusual cluster of cases.

“We do not think that there is any reason for the community to be alarmed about these cases,” said Cheryle Becker, RN, Epidemiologist for South Central District Health. “In our investigation so far, we do not see any common source of contagion between the women. We don’t think there is any reason for people to change their eating, drinking, or living habits. We will continue to investigate and inform the public of what we find.”

CJD is a rapidly-progressing fatal neurodegenerative disease. It is carried by prions, an abnormal form of protein in the blood stream. Prions cause folding of normal protein in the brain, leading to brain damage. The disease infects about one person per 1 million people worldwide annually.

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